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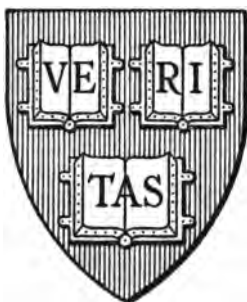
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Tinel. St. Francis of Assisi . 1893

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LODEWIJK DE KONINCK

English Poetry by
JOHN FENTON

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St. Francis of Assisi

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—BY—

EDGAR TINEL

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St. Francis of Assisi

PART I.

Francis' Life in the World and His Renunciation.

Choral Recitative.

Soft o'er Assisi falls the twilight hue of evening.
The dome of azure blue, the wide expanse of heaven
Is all aglow with stars ; fair sails the silent moon.
And slowly, one by one, the glitt'ring lights appear.
The gentle breezes waft us sweet and fragrant odors.
His Highness holds high feast. See there through
open portals

Fair damsels stand and wait, all glowing in the light
Of torches rosy red. Yet lacking is one still
Amid the youthful troop that, singing, now advances,
The wonder of the age, the poet idolized,

'Tis Francis!

Lo! in the moonbeam's silv'ry light,
Hither comes our Francis now!

He comes with his lute
Like a king in his pride,
To the triumphing group.
Hark! they are here!

(While singing the guests enter the castle.)

YOUTHS: Life is fair and life is easy
Here upon our golden path,
Where into the azure heaven,
Lightly wings the soul its flight.

KNIGHTS:

Hence ! hence! with all gathering trouble!
And let us in innocent glee
Drink deep of the river of pleasure!
The longing of youth is for mirth!

MAIDENS:

As the choir of tuneful birds
Flying 'neath the azure sky
Hymn sweet notes from countless voices,
Alternating each with other,
Ever merry, fresh and gay,
Sing we, too, with hearts as light.

KNIGHTS, YOUTHS AND MAIDENS:

Now sing we a carol,
Now tread we a measure!
To-day is for mirth,
For pleasure and joy.
Let care come
To-morrow!
And afterwards pain,
The soul's bitter woe!
Rejoicing and singing
Go skipping and whirling
Thro' life in the dance.
Youth is enchantment,
A dream, an illusion,
That blooms and decays.
To-day's are the roses—
Too soon they will wither—
Of mirth and of bliss!
To-morrow the malice,
The storms and the buffets
Of envious fate!

HOST:

Fair ladies, you are welcome here!
These noble youths are welcome, too!
I bid you welcome to my castle.
This is the realm of pleasure;
Gay and glad,
Free from care
Be ye here!
See, the lawn with myriad lights
Summons to the dance;

DANCE:

Now each one takes his order'd place.
They trip it in the merry dance,
 With knightly grace and courtly,
To gentle strains of tender flutes,
 The lute's soft note,
 The merry tone
Of zither and of fiddle.
How graceful and how dainty
The gay and glitt'ring groups appear
Beneath the torches' brilliant light,
Illumining the dancers!
See now the groups dissolving!
And now again in graceful curves,
That gather in a narrow ring,
The groups approach each other.
The feet so lightly tripping
Seem scarce to touch the earth beneath,
Like elfin, like fairy that dance
O'er field and meadow gliding.
See hither and thither;
With graces so courtly,—
How charming the scene—
They glide and they sway;
Approaching, retiring,
Saluting so featly
By rule as beseems
The noble and fair.
 So sparkling,
 So glowing,
The path that they trace,
So fragrant the air.
 All flowing
 And ebbing
Like waves of the sea,
 Appearing,
 Dissolving,
Appearing again,
An eddying ring;
Now once more appearing,

Now once more dissolving,
Now distant, now near,
And never the same.

But slower and slower
The music is playing,
And slower and slower
Revolves the circle and rests.

HOST:

My noble guests are weary now.
But Francis, thou who know'st so well
To weave the magic spell of tune,
Wilt thou not cheer us with a song?

FRANCIS:

Where shall I find the fitting numbers
To please a company so noble?

HOST:

Thou hast no lack of songs, we know;
Sing us some bold and knightly deed.

FRANCIS:

'Tis well; and if it gives you pleasure,
Please ye to listen to the story
Of poverty within the keep.
She dwelt a prisoner and watched
By him, the giant of this world;
And how a valiant knight did strive
To win the maiden's tender heart
And his sword for the maid did draw.

Ballad of Poverty.

See weeping on the castle tow'r,
Forlorn and lonely and deserted,
Of wealth and heritage despoiled,
A maiden nobly born and fair.

ASSISANS:

How sad and drear the maiden's fate,
Immured within the castle lone!

A giant in the darksome wood
Thus held the lovely maid imprisoned,
He thought to sate each lawless passion,
Relying on his boundless strength.

ASSISANS:

O giant! curb thy passion wild!
Have pity on the virgin fair.

Hard by there dwelt a youthful knight,
Of noble lineage descended,
He wore the golden spurs with honor
And he would wed the maiden fair.

ASSISANS:

So mild, so sweet, devout and good,
The maiden fair has won his heart!

He challenges the giant grim:
"Audacious stripling," roars the monster,
"Thy evil star hath sent thee hither,
Thy crime shall meet its due reward."

ASSISANS:

O luckless knight, thy fate is seal'd!
Commend thy hapless soul to God!

The monster swings his mighty club,
That erst had slain a thousand heroes,
With crash like thunder falls the weapon,
The earth reëchoes with the sound.

ASSISANS:

Alas! thy days are number'd now!
The giant's club will strike thee down.

For once the blow hath missed its aim,
The knight his trusty lance is poising,
The glitt'ring steel his hand is hurling,
The giant's eyelids close in death.

ASSISANS:

Hurrah! hurrah! To God be praise!
The giant grim hath bit the dust!

With tears of thanks the maiden fair
 Receives the noble knight, her savior.
 Her pain and sorrows all are vanished
 Like clouds before the rising sun.

ASSISANS:

All hail! O knight so bold and wise!
 The maiden fair is now his own!
 Thanks to Francis! Thanks to thee!
 Our hearts thou hast enchanted;
 Our souls thou hast bewitched!
 Thanks to Francis! Thanks to thee!

Choral Recitative.

The festive hall is now deserted;
 The glimm'ring lights will soon be quenched.
 And Francis wanders on his way
 With them his dearly lov'd companions,
 Strolling lightly, singing brightly
 Along Assisi's quiet lanes.

A VOICE FROM HEAVEN:

Franciscus! Franciscus! Franciscus!

FRANCIS:

Methought I heard a call.
 Who was it that was calling?

COMPANIONS:

We heard not e'en a word!
 Then waste no precious moments!
 With pleasure elate
 And with garlands adorn'd,
 We dance and are merry,
 We sing and are happy,
 Are gleesome and glad.

Haste ye now! Haste ye now!

The night is spent!
 The moonbeams bathe
 In silver light
 The turrets high,

The castle eaves and gables.
The hours of play are over;
Let each withdraw him to his couch,
When from the tow'r the clock strikes twelve.

WATCHMAN:

The streets are silent far and near!
Peace everywhere!
Softly sleep, good people all!
For you the watchman keeps good watch,
Townsmen, good night!

Choral Recitative.

Soft, soft, soft,
See, the mild and blessed night
Sheds her gentle balsam
On the eyes of weary sleepers.
And at peace with all creation
Sweetly Francis too reposes.

VOICE FROM HEAVEN:

Franciscus! Franciscus! Franciscus!

FRANCIS:

Who calls to me?
God! where am I? Is't illusion?
What magnificence resplendent
In these brilliant fairy halls!
Is it phantasy, a dream
Conjured up by sleep the master?
Who is she, that noble lady,
With the look angelic, mild,
And the shining robe of gold?
All along the walls so lofty
Armor gleams and weapons glitter,
And each scutcheon bears a cross!
Whose the maid? And whose the house?

VOICE FROM HEAVEN:

The halls so grand that God doth show thee
For thee and for thy sons are destined.

There with countless heroes thou
Shalt wrest the vict'ry for the Church.
The Saviour's cross shall be thy weapon
Wherewith thou shalt convert the nations;
For God's sake stript of earthly wealth,
Thou gainest thousand-fold reward.
The fairest maid, the queen of women,
That e'er a mortal eye hath gazed on,
She is named Poverty, thy bride,
The bride, the chosen bride of God.

FRANCIS:

All-pitying Father, who reignest in heaven,
Mine eyes they are blind
With the light of Thy glory;
I yield me to Jesus, His cross I embrace,
Rejecting the glory
And wealth of the world.
Have mercy, O Lord, on a worm of the dust,
Whom naught but thy grace can preserve from
destruction,
My God and my All!

VOICES FROM HEAVEN:

Hark! Hark! Heard ye the word
That hath fall'n from his lips?
The pleasures of earth he hath drunk to the full,
The pleasures of earth he hath wholly resign'd,
For Christ he bared himself of wealth,
To God be glory evermore!

PART II.

Francis' Monastic Life.

Choral Recitative.

The love of Christ in ev'ry Christian heart was dead,
And vanity o'er all. Corrupt was all the world.
The law is disobey'd and ev'ry land is wasted;
And men are steep'd in strife, in quarrel and in warfare.

The church of God doth mourn, she hopes, she cries
to God;

To suffer, struggle and to triumph is her lot.

ANGEL OF HOPE:

The early morn is dawning,
And Francis brings us comfort.

A breath

Of peace so mild, a gentle breath
Blows from the summits of the mountains;
And soon o'er every country fair
The sun of peace will shed his rays
Resplendent and majestic.

SPIRITS OF HELL:

We sow the accursed seed of strife,
And brandish the torch of dire division,
Unchain all the headlong rage of hate,
Till all the world in flame is glowing,
And war arises merciless.

The sword with a brother's blood shall drip,
Each bathes in the blood of fellow-mortals,
And each by the other's hand is slain,
The battlefield is heap'd with corpses,
For so must perish humankind.

ANGEL OF LOVE:

O come, all ye nations, assemble together,
And group around Francis, a pure constellation,
Whose heart is filled with love to man;
Oh! come, embrace with loving minds;

By embracing
Quench the hatred
In your hearts;
Let the awful voice of warfare,
Expiring,
Die away.
Then for ever
In your bosoms
Peace shall reign.

SPIRIT OF HATRED:

O come, all ye nations, assemble together,
And group around Satan, a dire constellation,
Whose heart is filled with hate to man;
Embrace, embrace with treach'rous mind,
By embracing
Stir the hatred
In your hearts;
Let the awful voice of warfare,
Aspiring,
Ne'er decay,
So that never
In your bosoms
Peace shall reign.

ANGEL OF PEACE:

Peace is my name,
I am the child of love so mild.
My work consolation,
I bring both peace and joy
To the land.
I am your part in God's own kingdom,
People, choose!

SPIRIT OF WAR:

Am war's red flame.
The offspring I of murder wild,
My work desolation.
I aim but to destroy
Ev'ry land.
I am your part in Satan's kingdom,
People, choose!

Recitative.

All pale and worn from rigid fasting,
And dead to ev'ry worldly pleasure,
All on fire for Jesus' cross,
From his cell here Francis comes.
He walks in peace along his path,
He wears a hairy, grayish garb,
His feet are bare and shorn his ringlets.
Can that be Francis, haught and noble ?

FORMER COMPANIONS OF FRANCIS:

Lo! Francis, nobly born, a freeman,
So fond of life, so gay, so charming;
How now? Dost wear a beggar's garb?
'Tis sheer disgrace, this foolish sport!

FRANCIS:

I love a maiden sweet and fair,
For her sake stript myself of all.

COMPANIONS:

Who is she, that her grace and beauty
Enchant thy heart and charm thy senses ?

FRANCIS:

She is the daughter of a king,
I love her with my heart and soul,
A noble maiden, true and tender,
She is the fairest of a thousand.

COMPANIONS:

Who may the lovely flower be
For whom our Francis' passion glows?

FRANCIS:

This winsome royal bride of mine,
Whom in my loving arms I clasp,
Who rests upon my beating heart,
Whose gentle yoke is round my neck,
Is—

COMPANIONS:

Tell us the royal maiden's name,
Whom thou hast chosen from them all!

FRANCIS:

'Tis Poverty, 'tis Poverty.
 Poverty, all bare and poor,
 Whom Christ hath given me to wife;
 For her dear sake I've stript myself,
 For Poverty, so bare and poor,
 Whom Christ hath chosen for my bride.

COMPANIONS:

A truly royal bride, forsooth,
 A very beggar's bride is she!

Hymn of Poverty.*

FRANCIS:

Have mercy on my need, O Lord!
 Behold the Lady Poverty.
 Her friends all scoff at her for whom
 Thou didst descend from heaven to earth.
 She met Thee in the manger poor,
 Nor for one moment left Thy side.
 She granted Thee no place of rest
 Where Thou could'st lay Thy weary head.
 And when Thy mother followed Thee
 With bitter tears to Calvary,
 And could not give one last embrace
 To Thy pierc'd body on the cross,
 'Twas Poverty who raised her head,
 And clasped Thee in her loving arms.
 She turn'd aside from Thy parch'd lips
 The draught that should have quenched Thy thirst;
 And in the arms of her, Thy bride,
 Thou gavest up the ghost, O God!
 How can I love but thee on earth,
 O sweetest Lady Poverty!

* The *Hymn of Poverty*, as well as the *Hymn of the Sun* and the *Hymn of Love*, which occur afterwards, are almost literal translations of poems traditionally attributed to St. Francis.

Recitative.

God the Lord hath now determin'd
That all Francis' pain and strife,
All his labor, all his toil,
Enrich creation.

ANGEL OF VICTORY:

Hail to Peace! Hail to Peace!
Peace that healed the woes of war.
Pride it was began the conflict,
Which the Lamb of God hath ended.
Christ hath conquered on the tree.
Meekness chose the manger poor,
Poverty the humble cross,
Whence all hell was terrified.
Hence the stream of peace doth flow,
Seek the source where Francis stands.

ANGELS:

Rejoice! for peace so mild doth reign!
And Francis now has conquer'd hell!
The heavenly peace he lavishes
Which God thro' him hath sent to men.

Choral Recitative.

Thousands five are there encamp'd,
Clad in poor and humble garb,
Where the pious chapter meets,
Gather'd round the father good.
In Spoleto's verdant valley
God Almighty's valiant host
Pitches peacefully its tents.
Countless saints in pray'r are wrestling,
Lo! the Seraph walks amid them.
Meek and humble, wondrously
He doth greet God's creatures all,
Greeteth brethren, greeteth sisters,
To the Author of all blessings
Sings the lofty hymn of praise,
With the others praising God.

Hymn of the Sun.

All praise to Thee, our God and Lord,
 In all the works that Thou hast made!
 The golden sun shall sing Thy praises,
 That gives us light and brings the day.
 How glorious are its beams, O Lord!
 The type of Thine eternal glory!

The silver moon doth praise Thee, too,
 With her the mild and sparkling stars;
 The snow, the storm, the fleecy clouds,
 The gloomy weather and the bright:
 Whereby the fruits of earth are rear'd,
 Whereby Thy countless creatures breathe.

The water sings Thy praises, too,
 The water, pure and silv'ry bright;
 The wild and all-refining fire.
 Our mother earth, too, sings Thy praise;
 The earth that brings us beauteous flow'rs,
 And herbs and fruits of every kind.
 Now praise ye all the Lord my God,
 And thank Him for His grace so boundless,
 In deep devotion serve ye Him.

VOICE FROM HEAVEN:

Franciscus! Franciscus! Franciscus!

Higher, higher, higher mount,
 Mount above the glorious sun,
 Mount above the shining planets!

Thou the hymn of Love must teach us,
 Hymn of Love so sweet and fair,
 Hymn of Love that glows like fire,
 Hymn of Love for ever boundless,
 Love that prints the burning tokens
 Of her wounds upon our hearts.
 Leave us as thy legacy
 What thy soul in holy fervor
 Sings of Love, of Love eternal,
 Chaste and holy, glowing bright
 When the sun hath ceased to shine.

Hymn of Love.

FRANCIS:

O Love hath pierc'd me to the heart,
 My heart with Love is all suffused;
 Love came and Love consumed with fire
 All hindrances that crost her path;
 For Love hath pierced me to the heart,
 My heart is melted with Love's flame.

For Love unsheath'd her sword of flame,
 And held the point against my breast;
 Like fire it pierced me to the heart,
 Methought that I should die of love;
 And in my sore distress methought
 That I in rapture must expire.

For Love drove me to very death,
 And then I tried new weapons' power,
 I fought a stubborn fight with Christ,
 But speedily I sued for peace,
 And peace was given me by Christ.
 How Love hath set my heart aflame.

ANGELIC VOICES:

Love, 'tis love that mildly rules
 Over all the virtues fair!
 She, the queen of highest heaven,
 Shall outlive all earthly creatures.
 Hope and faith shall pass away,
 Love, but love endures for aye!

PART III.**The Death and Glorification of Francis.****Choral Recitative.**

Low sinks the autumn sun
 To rest beneath the west;
 The last red gleam illumines
 Afar the mountain tops.
 With mortal sickness striving,
 And on his bed low lying,

Already glorified,
 Lo! Francis beams with joy.
 The Angelus is tol-ling,
 The bell with silver voice,
 The Ave bell is calling
 All men to ev'ning pray'r.

Angelus.

Spake to a virgin pure,
 God's holy messenger:
 Hail to thee,
 O Mary pure,
 In virtue rich,
 Fill'd with favor,
 Hail to thee!
 God's virgin, who dost serve Him well,
 His word is now fulfil'd in thee,
 His pow'r o'ershadows thee,
 Thou hast receiv'd His Word;
 The Word becometh flesh,
 He liveth in our midst
 In majesty reveal'd.
 Hail to thee,
 O Mary pure,
 In virtue rich,
 Fill'd with favor,
 Hail to thee!

FRANCIS:

O how sweet!
 How heavenly sweet!
 I hear the angels singing!
 I long, I yearn
 In highest heaven
 With ardent love
 To join in singing
 With heaven's choir
 Of blessed spirits
 This Ave sweet!

Choral Recitative.

The day star now has wholly faded;
 The shades of silent night have fallen;

See, light is gleaming in the cell—
Our Francis' soul now takes its flight.

FRANCISCANS: Woe! woe!
 For Francis dieth, dieth!
 The father, deeply loved, departeth.
 Woe! woe!

FRANCIS:
My children loved, now cease your weeping,
The hour of parting now is striking;
The bonds of earth I put aside:
Lay me to rest upon "Hell's Hill,"
And when I in my tomb am lying
Maintain my rule with strict observance.
May God the Lord preserve you all;
Serve Him in true humility;
And aye hold Poverty in honor.
I give you now my dying blessing,
Peace to you all in Jesus Christ.
I know,—that I am going home—
My soul her earthly bonds doth loosen—
I go to God—I shall behold Him—
I hear the choir of Seraphim—
My eyes grow dim—O God—I come!—

ANGELIC VOICES:
 Glory to God!
 He His servant safe hath brought
 To the port of bliss eternal!
 Praise and honor be for ever,
 Glory to God!

In the Church.

Lux setema—

Funeral March.

FRANCISCANS AND CLARES:
Ye clouds, why do ye low'r so gloomy,
And you, ye mists, so pale and gray!
Feel ye the bitter grief that bows us?
The carking sorrow in our hearts?
The winding sheet enwraps his body
Who was our shield, our firm stronghold.

Our bitter, bitter tears are flowing
And falling on our lov'd one's tomb!

MAIDENS: O now lament no more!
Strew flow'rs upon his grave!
Strew flowers rich of color
That never fade or wither,
That ever blossom sweetly

ANGELIC VOICES:
Dry the bitter tear-drops now!
Over Francis' glorious tomb
Nobly blooms his wondrous staff:
From its earthly clay released,
Lo! his spirit flies to heaven.
Praise to God in heav'n on high!

Final Chorus.

Glory to God!

To God the Lord be praise for ever and for ever!
For Francis now has reach'd the holy land of promise,
He rests in perfect peace in God's eternal light;
Beholds God's countenance in glory all unveil'd.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Rejoice! The vict'ry is completed,
And Poverty for him the victor's robe hath woven.
The giant of this world, man's bold and brutal pride,
Hath he destroy'd with Jesus' all-redeeming cross!
And till the world's end still that tree shall grow and
prosper,

Bear countless wondrous flowers and fruits of heav'nly
splendor

To honor God's high name, the tree so lowly set
In earth's dark vale of tears by Francis' humble hand.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Rejoice! The vict'ry is completed!
To earth's tir'd pilgrims peace! To God the Lord
be glory!

Triumph! Triumph! Triumph! The vict'ry is com-
pleted!

He wears the golden robe that Poverty hath wov'n!
Praise be to God!

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